

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information:

Jim Blasingame
The Shuchart Foundation for
Mental Health Awareness
314-610-2170
jim@theshuchartfoundation.org
www.notthebrightest.com

Humor Helps Author Overcome Depression, Fight Stigma Associated with Mental Illness

A Man's Got to Take a Lot of Punishment to Write a Really Funny Book.
– Ernest Hemingway

John Shuchart has taken more than his fair share of punishment in his 65 years. A successful entrepreneur Shuchart has survived a staggering number of traumatic incidents that began when he was just an infant, continued through adulthood, and led to his long battle with depression. Shuchart chronicles the “punishment” and his recovery from depression in his new book, *“You are not the brightest of my four sons” ... and other depressing things that have been said to me.*

Here’s a short list of the kinds of ill treatment and manipulation that Shuchart endured in the first half of his life:

*Raised in an emotionally abusive home, Shuchart was five years old when he had to undergo an emergency appendectomy. As John was about to be pushed through the double doors into the operating room, his father leaned over his hospital gurney and stated matter-of-factly, “They’re going to cut you open like a *chicken*.” Needless to say, young Johnny had to be restrained.

*At the age of eleven, John was sent across the country to spend the summer in a program designed to “fix” a so-called *right brain/left brain problem* that had been diagnosed by his mother. The program consisted of John being prohibited from using his right hand for *anything* for weeks, and it reinforced the idea that there was something “wrong” with him.

*An average student, and a year younger than his academically brilliant older brother, John was routinely referred to as “stupid” by his parents, even though he became fluent in Russian during high school. The book’s title is actually a comment made by John’s mother.

*Shuchart’s father, on two separate occasions, demanded that John give him a huge sum of money (\$30,000 and later \$50,000) or he would commit suicide. In another incident, John went to his uncle and grandfather to collect funds to reimburse an insurance company from whom his father had been embezzling money.

-more-

In addition to the emotional abuse heaped on John by his parents, Shuchart suffered two life-threatening accidents that exacerbated his depression. The first happened when his twelve-year-old son, Scott, was cutting their rain-slicked back yard on the family's riding lawnmower. John watched as Scott steered the mower under the swing set. Alarming, one of the swings became attached to the mower's clippings receptacle and caused the mower to jerk back like a horse rearing up. Fearing the mower would fall backward onto his son, Shuchart sprinted across the lawn, slipped on the wet grass, and slid under the mower as Scott jumped off. The front of the mower descended, bouncing off of John's leg, onto his midsection, and then toward his head – with the blade spinning. Shuchart managed to throw up his arms and somehow flip the mower onto its side, preventing further injury... or worse.

When Shuchart awoke following surgery, a dapper-looking gentleman informed him that he had spent the past couple of hours closing up John's wounds with over 300 stitches. The surgeon also informed Shuchart that it was "impossible" that the mower didn't do damage to at least one of his organs – "the liver, spleen – *something!*" Instead of performing major surgery, all the M.D. did was pick out the grass clippings and suture the wounds. But rather than feel fortunate, Shuchart ruminated on the experience as an embarrassing, humiliating event, which likely would be a normal response for someone with depression.

The other accident occurred 15 years ago. Shuchart endured a near-fatal motor vehicle accident that led to a deeper, more sustained depression. A truck carrying concrete blocks t-boned him at an intersection. The impact exploded every window in Shuchart's SUV, broke his seatbelt, and slammed him into the passenger side of the vehicle. Miraculously, Shuchart was not immediately or critically injured. In fact, he walked away. A few days later, Shuchart startled the insurance agent who called to settle the claim—with John's wife. He was astonished that Shuchart was still alive and had actually answered the phone.

Unfortunately, the physical trauma from the accident began to surface months later in the form of joint pain. Shuchart's personal physician informed him that he should be prepared for an ongoing series of doctor visits, x-rays and surgeries—all a result of the accident. To date, Shuchart has undergone 15 different surgeries on his wrists and shoulders to relieve pain and restore function in his joints.

Shuchart's continuous battle with pain led to an addiction to prescription medications. Even as the *Kansas City Business Journal* referred to the successful Shuchart as "a serial entrepreneur," he began making poor business decisions and having sustained blackouts. Feeling irretrievably buried in "the deep dark hole of depression," Shuchart saw no other way out. He decided he would take his own life.

Shuchart opted for carbon monoxide poisoning. He could rent a garage-like storage unit, pull in, close the door, start the car, and drift off. He did a Google search to find the name of a storage facility he had driven by recently. He stumbled across an online

-more-

advertisement for a unit that was pretty close to his house, plus it was offering the first month's rent for *free*. All he had to do to get the free month was sign a one-year contract. "Heck," he thought, "I could sign a *lifetime* contract."

Then Shuchart laughed.

"Here I am about to kill myself, and I'm choosing the location based on the freaking *price!*" Shuchart said. "But as I laughed, something important happened. My sadness began to go away."

For Shuchart, that was a turning point. He suddenly realized that he couldn't laugh and feel sad at the same time. He recalled that a therapist had once asked him to think about the earliest traumatic events in his life and "reframe" them. The therapist told Shuchart that just like when we change a frame on a painting and it often alters the way the painting appears, he could change the way an event looked to him by changing its frame. He couldn't change what happened, but he *could* change how he viewed it, seeing it now through the eyes of an adult. Shuchart describes in his book how he's used humor to reframe the traumatic incidents of his life and help "un-stick" the negative emotions tied to them. His story is touching, funny, and ultimately uplifting.

Shuchart continues to work on his recovery from depression. He also has become a champion in the fight against the stigma associated with mental illness. Shuchart is a board member for the Kansas state chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Kansas, and an active supporter of the Greater Kansas City Mental Health Coalition. He wants people to understand that having a mental illness doesn't prevent you from accomplishing great things and leading a rich, fulfilling life.

"Look at all of the public figures, the celebrities and athletes that have shared their experiences with mental illness. These are very accomplished people," Shuchart said. "Now is the time to educate the public about conditions like depression and bipolar disorder, and encourage people to talk about it, and get the care and the treatment they need."

Last summer, Shuchart went public with his personal battle with depression. In a television interview with the local Kansas City Fox TV affiliate, Shuchart spoke about his mental illness and the stigma associated with it. "There's an ache that doesn't ever seem to go away. There's this feeling that you'll never ever be happy again," Shuchart said. "I've had prostate cancer and people say 'oh, okay.' But when I say I have a mental illness, they shy away."

"We can help patients, their friends and family understand that these conditions are illnesses, just like AIDS or cancer," Shuchart said. "We shouldn't be afraid or ashamed to talk about these disorders. Talking about them is how we will end the stigma."

-more-

Shuchart is marketing his book as a fundraising opportunity for non-profits that provide support for people with mental illness. Nonprofits will earn \$5 for each book they sell. Individuals interested in the book can go to the book website (www.notthebrightest.com) and designate a nonprofit group to receive the \$5 donation generated from their book purchase.

Additionally, Shuchart and his team are developing unique, fun workshops for therapists and social workers, teaching them how to work with their patients by using humor in their struggles with mental illness. The entertaining workshops qualify for continuing education units (CEU's) for industry professionals.

For a man who has taken so much punishment from life, Shuchart is standing strong. He will carry his crusade to end the stigma to nonprofit groups across the country, booking speaking engagements (free of charge) to expand the fight against the mental illness stigma and helping these important organizations raise funds.

“These nonprofits have a greater financial need than national booksellers,” Shuchart said, “and we are committed to this unique marketing arrangement. Nonprofits keep about 30% of the total cost of the book which is a healthy sum when there's no risk involved on their part.”

“I have to lead by example,” Shuchart said. “By writing this book, by creating the workshop, by speaking to groups, I'm standing out front, saying to everyone and anyone who will listen, ‘I have a mental illness. I have owned six businesses. I wrote a book. I have great friends and family, and I'm okay!’”

To learn more about John Shuchart and his book *“You are not the brightest of my four sons” ... and other depressing things that have been said to me*, or to schedule him to speak with your group, go to www.notthebrightest.com.

###